

Great to be back home!

Flyers Inn juggles challenge of surge

Article and photo
by SSgt. Andrew Biscoe

These workers are in the eye of the storm of Westover's surge of operations now stretching into its third month.

And for those who might have misconceptions about how active the base is, they don't have to look any further than 650 Airlift Drive.

That's the address of the Flyers Inn, the hub of Westover lodging operations. Perched on a gentle slope on the southern end of the base, this is where the staff handles a constant flow of guests.

They are reservists from throughout New England who travel to Westover for the traditional weekend UTA's. Or they're a tired transient C-5 aircrew seeking a good night's rest before completing another leg of a flight that covers half of the world.

The lodging staff falls under the 439th Services Squadron. They have only been able to meet the demands of a 24-hour schedule with help from four mobilized reservists. Three augmentees with a New York state Air Force Reserve unit arrived to help in March. They are from the 914th Services Squadron in Niagara Falls. Another augmentee from Westover's services squadron is also on the inn staff.

Each day, the desk clerks and housekeepers work with a core of about 300 rooms on base. Another 160 rooms will be added this summer. The staff assists its guests to find places close to Westover, but sometimes that means military people are put up as far as Bradley International Airport, about a half-hour's drive south of the base on Interstate 91.

Services Director Chris Menard said the 160 new rooms will greatly help the staff meet the lodging needs. "We can handle the day-to-day stuff; it's the UTA's that generate spillover into the local hotels," he said.

That's why finding rooms is especially challenging when the weekend rolls around, said Kathy Roy, front desk supervisor and group reservationist. When rooms fill up on base, she and her staff coordinate lodging needs with area hotels in Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, and Chicopee.

The surge has sent a steady stream of aircrews through Westover, most of which are transient C-5 stage crews.

"Since February, we have averaged eight aircrews per day with between 10 and 12 crew members," Roy said, over a steady jingle of telephones at the front desk. "It does get very hectic."

(continued on next page)



Security specialists of the 439th SFS step foot on American soil for the first time last Sunday after six months in the Iraqi Freedom AOR. Maj. Maryann Lutz, squadron commander led the 11-member team during their overseas deployment. Others greeted at the Passenger Terminal upon their return home were 1st Lt. Shawn Swarz, CMSgt. Frank Puopolo, SMSgt. Michael Thorpe, MSgt. Randy Bates, MSgt. Stephen Valley, TSgt. Michael Bellerose, TSgt. Paul Cyr, TSgt. Rick Schmoke, SSgt. Bruce Lawler and SSgt. Wayne Baptiste.

-- photo by MSgt. W.C. Pope

Frontiersmen ride first class

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Thirteen Frontiersmen maintainers from the 914th Airlift Wing, Niagara Falls, N.Y. got more than a first class welcome when they arrived here from overseas recently. The Iraqi Freedom veterans also got a first class ride home. Their wing commander, Col. Wade Farris, flew here in a Niagara Falls C-130 to fly them home on the last leg of their long flight from Southwest Asia.

The Niagara Falls maintainers had been at a bare base in the Iraqi Freedom AOR since March operating six of their C-130s Hercules. Among those here to welcome them home were Niagara Falls Services members who have been helping the Patriot Wing since the start of the surge.

For several of those coming home from the Iraqi Freedom AOR, the Westover Welcome was the second time they had walked across a red carpet laid out by the Patriot Wing.

MSgt. Bill Bulleigh and TSgt. John Gallaway came home from Desert Storm almost exactly 12 years earlier by way of the long red carpet in the Base Hangar. Some of the same USO volunteers who greeted the Niagara Falls maintainers in 1991 were in the Passenger Terminal for the 2003 replay, including Marilyn Spofford and Margaret Cote.

For Gallaway, an aerospace ground equipment specialist, the Westover welcome was déjà vu. In both 1991 and 2003 he was caught off-guard by the red carpet treatment.

"We weren't expecting the hugs, flags and grilled hamburgers and hot dogs when

we got here. It was great seeing another red carpet," he said.

The USO volunteers, music and red carpet were reminiscent of the Desert Storm welcome, Gallaway said. "That was fantastic," he said of 1991. "The people who showed up, especially the Vietnam vets. It was really touching."

"We weren't expecting this at all," said Bulleigh, a plans and scheduling specialist. For those who experienced the pomp of the Desert Storm welcome home, it is something they will never forget. The Passenger Terminal may be smaller than the Base Hangar of Desert Storm days, but the "the flags and hugs were a nice treat," he said.

The hamburgers and hot dogs were a special treat for troops who had been eating MREs in recent days. They came here from a desert base that closed its dining hall more than a week before they departed as part of the base closing process.

"It was a pretty bare base when we arrived," Gallaway said. There was no chow hall. We ate MREs for the first week or two. Then they served one hot meal a day, then two hot meals," he said.

When they arrived in March the temperature was already in the 80s and continued to climb until they left. Entertainment was a TV tent, a volleyball net and "dumbbells" fashioned out of sandbags.

The recreational highpoint of their time in the desert air base was when Kentucky Air Guard members bought 800 pizzas to help everybody celebrate Derby Day.

The air base accommodated C-130 Hercules and F-15 Eagle.

Lodging... (continued from front)

"We make sure the aircrews get their crew rest," said MSgt. Barbara Hall, a Niagara Falls augmentee. Hall could be at Westover for up to a year. A member of the 914th's port mortuary team, Hall has frequently deployed before. The 18-year veteran handled front desk duties at Mildenhall, England, and has worked in the recreation, fitness and food service areas of services.

She liked how the services mission support has been at Westover. "Everybody's really looking out for people that are coming back from the sandbox," Hall said.

"Their help is wonderful," front desk clerk Kim Desotell said about the difference the augmentees have made. Similar to the civilian hotel industry, Desotell said her job requires that she and her co-workers go out of their way to accommodate their guests. "I'm a people person," she said. "Some people are cranky. We deal with it. The customers are always right."

Facing another busy weekend recently, Roy spoke about the diligence and patience that her workers have shown while the base has met challenges and shortfalls in resources.

"All of our desk clerks and housekeepers have been working very hard," Roy said. "Some times having the aircrews can be very demanding, but our workers are always polite and do their jobs."

Menard said these workers were at the core of Westover's initial response to the surge of aircrews that descended into Westover, and its Flyers Inn, this past winter. "Initially, it took many man hours and personal sacrifice on the part of our lodging crew to accommodate everyone," he said. "Most of the management staff (civilian) worked around the clock on numerous occasions to meet the needs of incoming crews at all hours of the night."

In the meantime, Hall said, service is what lodging is all about, no matter what the challenges are. "We give them the best hotels that we can," she said.

58th Aerial Porters keep Guam moving

by Maj. John P. Mailo
Deployment OIC

A team of 20 aerial porters of the 58th APS completed two weeks of duty at Andersen AFB, Guam, working along side of the transporters of the 734th Air Mobility Squadron in April.

Working with the 734th AMS in Guam provided premier training with state of the art facilities that afford supervisors the opportunity to assess and measure aerial porters' experience and knowledge.

Andersen AFB is the major AMC en-route station for all cargo and passengers transiting the Pacific theater. The strategic importance of Andersen was magnified with the closing of Clark AB in the Philippines 12 years ago.

It is true that for 103 years Guam is where America's day begins. Sunny days, bright blue skies, gentle trade winds and crystal clear waters are the hallmarks of Guam. Even the threat of Typhoon Kujira could not dampen the spirits of the 58th APS. Fortunately, it passed harmlessly 140 miles south of the island.

The large number of aircraft transiting Andersen allowed the Patriot Wing aerial porters to hone their skills and learn to resolve potential problems with aircraft with which they do not normally work, including KC-10s, KC-135s, C-17s and C-9s. In addition, the variety of commercial cargo airframes, including MD-11, 747, DC-10 and DC-8, provided excellent training for the aerial porters to rediscover skills that are not used on a daily basis at Westover.

The 58th APS was integrated into all facets of the 734th AMS Passenger Service Terminal, Air Terminal Operations Center and Air Freight Services.

A bonus of the trip was that six squadron members were certified on the 60 K aircraft

Pat Stats

Served since Feb. 2, 2003
5,712 passengers --- 1,989 aircraft
20,729,587 pounds of cargo
Info from MSgt. Jim Garrity, 42APS

Meals
12,092 hot meals served
Box lunches: 4,915
Info from MSgt. David Beauregard, 439SVS

Fuel since Feb. 1
12,976,935 gallons of JP-8
Info from Jim Maloney, Fuels

loader. The 60 K loader is the mainstay of the material handling of equipment fleet and required for all transporters. The comprehensive two-week course includes academic instruction in the fundamentals, maintenance and operation of the vehicle.

Certification on the new 25K Halverson loader was also provided. This was a win for the squadron MHE training and unit readiness. The classes allowed the aerial porters to maximize their training opportunities.

The tour was a homecoming of sorts for MSgt. Stephen Winters. His father was a Westover B-52 pilot who deployed to Guam during the Vietnam War and flew Arc Light bombing missions from Andersen's runways.

TSgt. Charles Allen was stationed at Andersen for 18 months and renewed old acquaintances. Winters and Allen could not believe how much the base has changed.

Last Dec. 8 super typhoon Pongsonga slammed ashore with 180 mph sustained winds and gusts of more than 240 mph. The typhoon stalled over Guam for 17 hours, dumping 15 inches of rain and causing \$121 million in damages.

Andersen suffered serious damage to many base facilities. The results were still evident when the 58th APS was on Guam. Roofs were torn off, buildings demolished and trees uprooted. Street signs were missing and the poles bent flat to the ground.

PATRIOT express

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Security guidelines prohibit using last names of deploying reservists.)

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Express-ions

